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Leadership Competency Series

Where the Leaders Dare

'Confidence and Bravery' operates from the inner rudder which brings preparedness to deal with known or unknown situations successfully, says M R CHANDRAMOWLY

"The history of the world is full of men who rose to leadership, by sheer force of self-confidence, bravery and tenacity." said Mahatma Gandhi. Leaders like him offer not just the hope to achieve, but also the confidence to embrace that hope.

Dreaming to achieve is an ambition. Setting action plan and working towards an ambition, with a firm belief that it will be done, is confidence. Confidence supported by right values and purpose promotes positive success. The Leadership Competency, confidence or self-confidence is the ability to take tough stand, to provide tough factual feedback or to step up on issues with those in higher power based on strong principles and convictions without any element of self.

Goleman (Emotional Intelligence) defines Self-confidence as a strong sense of one's self worth and capabilities. Research shows (Boyatzis) that self-confident leaders can face difficult situations and they often have a sense of presence, a self-assurance that lets them stand out in a group. They play on their strengths, fully knowing their abilities.

Confidence and leadership

A leader with this competency is courageous to face a win-lose situation; not holding on to any matter of critical importance and has the nerve to say what has to be said. He/she understands when and how to elevate issues to higher level authorities when actions being taken are inconsistent with legal or higher level policy requirements. They exhibit courage to take a stand when an issue is considered important to the well being of the organisation's mission or reputation.

One of the first Indian industrialists was asked once, what was the secret of his success. He answered, "One must have ambition and must understand the minds of men." He had the confidence of growing big and displayed bravery to make it happen. How? He knew what it was like to be poor and when banks turned him away for support, when he badly needed money, he turned for the only support, the public. He knew that the key success of a business depended on confidence and bravery. He also knew that dabbling on the stock market, keeping track of share prices and supporting scrip whenever it wobbled is not a permanent solution. He had the confidence of playing an active role to benefit his shareholders by capital appreciation and not by awarding generous dividends. "The world

is a series of orbits, hierarchically stacked up with peons and clerks at the bottom and leading industrialists and politicians at the top. To be successful, you must break out your orbit and enter the one above. After a spin in that orbit, you must break into the next one, and so on until you reach the top - that was the confidence and bravery lesson of Dhirubhai Ambani.

Self-confidence and bravery injects power to make right decisions, to move in a coherent direction consistently keeping aside the external hurdles and discouragement. With their social skills, confident leaders take tough decisions without being rude or defensive. They stand by certain principles underpinning their confidence. Confidence is a result of knowledge derived from pure personal experience. It is an understanding of natural laws of life like cause and effect. Confident leaders are more peaceful and patient in the process and they move around with preparedness in their mind to tackle situations in reality and social context.

Generating Confidence

An important key to self-confidence is preparation. M S Oberoi, born in a small Punjab village began his career on a fifty-rupee-a-month wage at Simla's Cecil hotel. But he was not destined to remain in his lowly position for long. With growing confidence and bravery combined with clear-sighted thinking, preparedness and hard work he became a standard setter with chain of Oberoi Group around the globe. He had a courage balanced with reality when he said “I have gambled all my life and still managed to sleep at night.”

M S Oberoi’s multi-crore empire began in 1934 with a basic investment of Rs 16,000 to make Clarke’s Hotel hospitable with two objectives. To provide “clean bed” and “sumptuous food”. His brave strategy was to own a property so that it can be used as collateral for further loans. He wisely invested wartime windfall of unplanned profits earned, to make golden geese. He was the first Indian to get huge loans from financial institutions in hotel industry. “I do not believe in karma or something beyond. The life is most important. I strongly believe, light the candles in your home before you light them in the temple”, those were the words of Oberoi whose confidence, bravery and preparedness to take heart-stopping risks, elevated him to greater heights of extraordinary business accomplishments.

Self-confidence is the essence of achieving results. People who lack this conviction fail to take on to tough challenges. Self-confidence magnetises self-assurance for forging ahead as a leader. Absence of self-confidence is visible in human emotions of helplessness, weakness and self-doubting tendency. Extreme self-confidence on the other hand could turn to outright arrogance. The value of self-confidence is negative if it doesn’t reflect social-good and reality. People with self confidence can master new things and quickly manage to change and face challenges. They cannot be easily intimidated or pressurised. Psychologists say that confidence is a state of happiness and is built in a person who believes that goal in life is to be happy. Enthusiastic visualisation of positive feelings and recollection of past success builds confidence. When a confident leader doesn’t know something important, he acknowledges the same and is actively curious to learn by

encouraging others to debate to bring out different dimensions of an issue.

Developing self-confidence

Confidence developed with external protection and security is tentative and may be sufficient to just live, but one cannot move on to achieve greater success. Confidence is an intrinsic factor. It comes from within, from conscience and principles pulsating in our inner rudder.

How to develop confidence and bravery? Besides the self-assessment and feedback, the learning comes for paying attention to experience. Larry Bossidy, the former CEO of Honeywell International and the Vice-Chairman of GE suggests (Execution - The discipline of getting things done) ' as people reflect on their experiences, and as they get couched, blockages crumble and emotional strengths develop. Sometimes the “ahas” also come from watching others' behaviour: your observational capabilities make you realise that you too have a blockage that you need to correct. Either way, as you gain experience in self-assessment, your insights get converted into improvements that expand your personal capacity.'

Enhancing confidence is not an intellectual exercise. It requires tenacity, persistence and daily engagement. It needs reflection and modification of personal behaviour. Once an individual get on this track, the capacity for growth is almost unlimited. The supporting human values for this competency are uprightness, righteousness, perception of ultimate and patience.

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